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THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

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The supreme value of Jesus in Christian religious experience has been appropriately expressed in the doctrine of the deity of Christ. This doctrine has been cherished as the corner stone of sound theological construction. But again and again it has been discovered that too exclusive emphasis on the deity of Christ leads to religious dangers. For, since the nature of God is necessarily defined by metaphysical speculation, there is room for a wide range of hypothetical conceptions. To define Christ in terms of this metaphysics opens the way for important differences of opinion in Christology, and ultimately suggests the possibility that certain doctrinal affirmations concerning Christ may be clever speculations rather than statements of fact. The only way in which to test the truth of christological speculations is to insist that these shall do justice to the facts of Jesus' earthly life as well as to the demands of theological consistency.

It is true that until the development of modern historical criticism, the test employed was that of citing proof-texts from Scripture rather than a careful scrutiny of the life of Jesus. At the same time, men were compelled to recognize the historical figure of Jesus, and to make some place in Christology for his existence and activity in the flesh. This earthly life was genuine—that was the affirmation made against all suggestions of docetism, and, being genuine, it played an essential part in the saving work of Christ.

One of the most conspicuous achievements of theological scholarship during the past century has been a new and intimate acquaintance with the historical Jesus. It has come to be taken for granted that we must press back of the doctrinal statements of the church to the testimony of those who were in close relationship to Jesus

during his earthly life, and that this testimony must be critically examined in order to discover, so far as possible, the real Jesus of history. The problem of evaluating that testimony and of piecing together the fragmentary information at our disposal has proved to be more complicated than was formerly anticipated, and we are as yet far from any consensus of opinion on many crucial points.

But, even though historical investigation is still tentative, it has had a profound influence on Christian thinking. Never before in Christian history has the life of Jesus been so concretely in mind. We are seeing the rapid development of a type of Christianity which attaches far more importance to a knowledge of the life and the teachings of Jesus than to any doctrinal formulations of his person and work. The textbooks prepared for religious education in Sunday schools, Young Men's Christian Associations, and colleges are with increasing skill and effectiveness making the deeds and teachings of Jesus all-important. Men are more and more judging the church by asking whether it introduces into individual and social life the spirit which was in Jesus. So far as personal religious life in our day is concerned, there is a veritable renaissance of interest in the historical Jesus.

In view of this fact it is worth while to ask how the human life of Jesus is being interpreted by theologians. For unless justice is done to this characteristic interest of our day, the subtle suggestions of docetism will go unchallenged.

I. THE METAPHYSICAL INTERPRETATION OF HUMANITY

Our theological inheritance dates from the controversies which evoked the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. These controversies are intelligible only as a metaphysical conception of redemption is presupposed. The evil from which man needs to be saved is grounded in his "nature." Human nature is inherently corruptible. Every human being is destined to die. Divine nature, on the other hand, is incorruptible. Possessors of divine nature may overcome death. The saving work of Christ, then, consists in bringing incorruptible divine nature into such organic relations with human nature that the latter may be deified. The incarnation, rather than the life of Jesus, is the supreme thing in this conception. The

humanity of Jesus must, indeed, be real; but its function is simply to serve as a metaphysical vehicle by which the saving power of Christ's deity may be imparted to men.

Where this metaphysical conception obtains, there is little interest in the human experience of Jesus. He is pictured during his earthly life as one ever conscious of his superhuman character. All his deeds and words are considered as expressions of a divine purpose to make plain the way of salvation. The personality of Jesus is conceived as entirely divine. His humanity is merely the necessary medium for communicating the power of divinity to needy men.

From this point of view there is no necessity for thinking of Jesus as a human personality. Indeed, to do so would detract from the completeness of his deity. So we find the interesting doctrine that Jesus possessed an *impersonal* human nature. Dr. A. H. Strong clearly expresses this conception:

Since the human nature of Christ has not, and never had a separate existence, it is impersonal, and in the God-man the Logos furnishes the principle of personality.¹ . . . Christ's human nature . . . attains self-consciousness and self-determination only in the personality of the God-man.²

When we examine the religious significance of this metaphysical interpretation we are led straight into one of the most stubborn theological controversies of our day. The advocates of the metaphysical theory are conscious of a great uplifting experience because through faith in the divine Christ they are enabled to feel that God touches them and transforms them. It seems to them that if Jesus were a human personality, his earthly life would be an entity separating God from human vision instead of serving to bring God into immediate contact with men. They thus view with impatient distrust the increasing habit of studying the historical Jesus as a human personality. They call loudly for a return to the metaphysical way of defining the nature of Christ. The late Dr. Charles A. Briggs declared:

Lives of Jesus Christ are really modern conceptions, which in some respects lead to false ideas of Him. The New Testament leaves all those things that go to make up a biography in the background of His teaching and of His

¹ *Systematic Theology*, II, 695.

² *Ibid.*, p. 694.

miracles of love; and thus makes Him, what He is and must be from the very nature of the case, the Messiah and Savior, a mystery, a unique man, one apart from all men in a unique relation to God, His Father, in a sense peculiar to Him alone.¹

The metaphysical interpretation of the humanity of Jesus is thus inevitably hostile, both to the historical attempt to reconstruct the life of Jesus as a citizen of this world, and to the conception of Christianity which would make that life, in its moral and social attitude, normative in Christian experience. This distrust is due to the fear lest such an emphasis will substitute a mere humanistic religion for the sublime experience of finding the fulness of God in Christ. But when carefully examined in the light of our present conceptions of personal life, this exaltation of Jesus proves to be open to objection for reasons similar to those which have always been urged against docetism.

The ancient theologians insisted upon the unimpaired completeness of the human nature of Christ. For Christ could redeem only that which he actually possessed. As against the religious sentiment which, because flesh was considered the seat of evil, strove to honor Christ by declaring that his sojourn on earth was that of a purely spiritual being, the leaders of Christian thought courageously insisted on the genuine fleshly character of Jesus. It was seen that unless Jesus completely shared our humanity, there was a gulf between him and us which made real salvation impossible. Docetism, while seeming to exalt the divinity of Jesus, actually made that divinity impotent to transform human nature. And for *Christian* theology a God powerless to save men would be no God at all.

Today we are thinking of the issues of life, not in terms of metaphysical human nature, but in terms of personal activity. The great moral and social movements of our day are endeavors to make possible a richer realization of personal life. The struggle for democracy is precisely the longing to free *persons* from bondage. It is coming to be seen that the gravest sins of our time are due to a willingness to use men *impersonally*, to regard human activities as a commodity to be traded with like other commodities. If

¹ *The Fundamental Christian Faith*, p. 114.

Christianity is to be a transforming power in the present world, it must, in the fine phrase of President Henry Churchill King, cultivate a "reverence for personality."

What, then, shall be said of a Christology which thinks to exalt Jesus by denying to him human personality? Such a denial is the modern counterpart of the gnostic docetism which true Christianity repudiated. If Jesus was not a genuinely human person, there is a gulf between him and us no less fatal than the gulf discovered in ancient docetism. If it was essential to the metaphysical conception of salvation that Jesus should live a genuine life in the flesh, it is equally indispensable to the saviorhood of Jesus in our age that he live as a genuine human person. Just as ancient docetism dissolved Christ into a vague spirit or ghost, so modern docetism leaves him a mysterious metaphysical concept. If the possession of fleshly nature was essential to his saviorhood in the older theology, the possession of a human moral and religious personal experience is essential to modern faith. For in modern thinking *persons* rather than "natures" are to be transformed.

An interesting and instructive example of the conflict between the inherited reverence for a metaphysical definition of Christ's nature and a lively appreciation of the sacredness of personality in modern thinking is furnished by Professor Mackintosh's *Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*. He frankly recognizes both the absurdity and the moral defects of a conception of impersonal human nature. Says he: "As our initial datum we may select the truth that Jesus, as man, was possessed of personal individuality. He was not only Man. He was *a* man."¹ Professor Mackintosh goes into details to establish this thesis. He notes the dependence of Jesus' inner life on his senses, his genuinely human experience of moral problems, the real tug of temptation in his life, the hopes which blazed up only to be disappointed, the actual limitations of his knowledge, his need of prayer, and his sense of joy at experiencing the presence of God.² There is evidently the intention to eradicate all traces of docetism, and to insist on the complete humanity of Jesus in terms of our modern conception of humanity.

¹ *Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 385.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 395 ff.

Nevertheless, such is the power of the traditional emphasis that Professor Mackintosh proceeds to make certain qualifications intended to establish a decisive difference between Jesus' experience and that of other men. A few sentences will make this clear:

To speak as if without more ado we could adopt Jesus' undimmed filial consciousness is to play with words.¹ . . . Jesus' communion with God was a secret of his own soul; but so far as he revealed it openly, we can see it to be quite inimitable by us. *His* relation to the Father was immediate; *ours*, as he taught, is only in and through him.² . . . The suggestion that the "religion of Jesus" represents the essence of Christianity may be dismissed as an impressionist and superficial error.³ We are called not to believe like him, but to believe in him.⁴

If, now, we take the modern emphasis on personal experience as the essential thing to be cherished in religion, such declarations as the above deny to Jesus a complete human experience. He remains forever distinct from us. His communion with God was "quite inimitable by us." We cannot venture to "believe like him." While Professor Mackintosh sees clearly that the conception of an impersonal human nature in Jesus would rob religion of those volitional and moral factors which we today regard as the supreme good, he nevertheless conceives Jesus as a personality with qualities and activities so different from ours that he belongs to a different species. He did not completely share human experience. His life on earth was that of a superhuman being, belonging essentially to a higher order, rather than that of a genuine citizen of this world. There is a definite docetism here.

The moral and religious outcome of this conception is especially unfortunate when it is brought into relation with democratic ideals. If human experience is incompatible with divine perfection, such experience is depreciated. We thus have an essentially aristocratic ideal. Humanity is an unworthy medium for the expression of Jesus' excellence. And his appearance in human form is described by Professor Mackintosh in terms which reflect the patronizing attitude of an essentially "upperclass" consciousness:

¹ *Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 359.

² *Ibid.*, p. 360.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

God in Christ, we believe, came down to the plane of suffering men that he might lift them up. Descending into poverty, shame, and weakness, the Lord was stripped of all credit, despoiled of every right, humbled to the very depths of social and historical ignominy, that in this self-abasement of God there might be found the redemption of men.¹

Jesus' life in the flesh is apparently regarded as a humiliation, as an "ignominy," as an "abasement," even though it was entered into with the lofty purpose to save men. There can be no real valuation of humanity if it constituted such an ignominious experience for divinity to assume it. Salvation—and this is the fatal moral defect of docetism—must come in such a case as something alien to humanity rather than as the development of what is admirable in humanity. If God must "descend into shame" when he assumes the conditions of human life, that life is so discredited that it cannot play a positive part in the experience of salvation.

Thus in spite of Professor Mackintosh's unequivocal assertion of the full humanity of Jesus, he turns his doctrine of salvation in such a way as to make the mysterious and (to us) inaccessible "secret of Jesus' own soul" the crucial factor. And the distinction between Jesus and us is so stressed that our salvation is made to depend on a mystical trust in what is alien to us rather than on an actual sharing of the life of Jesus.

Although Professor Mackintosh does not express that hostility to the historical study of the character of Jesus which we find in Dr. Briggs's protest, it is significant that he makes a very superficial use of historical canons in his treatise. It is the Johannine estimate of Jesus which he regards as the ultimate fact of the New Testament testimony. His Christology is still so under the sway of the metaphysical interpretation that he cannot sympathetically employ the methods or the results of historical criticism. And his elaborate kenoticism will have little meaning for the type of Christian discipleship which finds its supreme inspiration in the positive value of the human experience of Jesus. Even with the best intention to conserve the real human personality of Jesus, the theologian who retains any trace of that ancient metaphysical dualism between divine nature and human nature is unable to make

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 466 and 467.

positive use of the findings of historical and psychological study. But unless the Christ of faith is identical in personality with the Jesus of history, docetism is inevitable; and docetism opens the door to unverifiable speculations concerning Christ which eventually lead to vague generalizations. The adoration of a metaphysical mystery in the incarnation supplants an appreciation of the moral and religious traits of character found in the historical personality of Jesus.

II. THE RITSCHLIAN EMPHASIS UPON THE HISTORICAL JESUS

One of the important aspects of the Ritschlian theology has been the refusal to employ a metaphysical Christology. Christian faith, the Ritschlian affirms, must not be dissolved into speculation concerning the "nature" of Christ. Its firm foundation is to be found in actual history rather than in an inaccessible transcendent realm. There is abundant room for question and doubt concerning the invisible and incomprehensible God of ancient metaphysics. But the historical person of Jesus is a definite objective reality. A faith based on this indubitable fact of history cannot be shaken by speculative questionings. In elaborating a Christology, then, the Ritschlian derives his data from "the man Jesus,"—to use a favorite phrase of Herrmann.

At first sight, this seems like a serious attempt to shake off the last vestiges of docetism, and to build positively on the humanity of Jesus. But Ritschlianism conceives salvation in such a fashion as to fail to fulfil this promise.

The Ritschlian theology was strongly influenced by a pessimistic conception due to the extraordinary growth of natural science. In the place of the older theological explanation of our world, physical science had elaborated a purely naturalistic account of both man and his environment. The newer science was religiously atheistic. With La Place it could calmly say that it had no need for the hypothesis of God.

On the basis of this scientific interpretation of nature, there is no religious hope unless some power other than nature shall be available for man's rescue. Ritschlianism is profoundly concerned to make credible the reality of such a salvation. We must be

delivered from the power of this (naturalistic) world by an exhibition of supernatural grace. Christian experience is conceived, not as a natural growth, but rather as a response to a supernatural gift of grace.

Thus with all his emphasis on "the man Jesus," the Ritschlian theologian is primarily concerned to discover the *revelation of God in Jesus*. The deeds and words of the historical Jesus are, indeed, the chief material for a doctrine concerning him. Pauline and Johannine and Nicene theologies are treated as belonging to the history of doctrine. Great stress is laid on the necessity of studying Jesus himself rather than doctrines about him. Nevertheless this study of Jesus is not for the purpose of ascertaining precisely the significance of his human life. It is rather a quest for such qualities in the character of Jesus as make him the revelation of God to us. The human life of Jesus is a channel for this revelation. The real value of Jesus consists in his God-revealing power rather than in his religious experience as a human personality. Says Herrmann:

In it [i.e., the inner life of Jesus] we ourselves meet the Personal Spirit, who in all that he does to us confirms the claim tradition makes for him that he is the Saviour of the world.¹ . . . Under the impression that Jesus makes upon us there arises in our hearts the certainty that God himself is turning towards us in this experience.²

Even more explicit is Haering:

It is only the true personal energizing of God in a real historical Person that furnishes adequate means for realizing that personal fellowship with God. . . . We gain trust in the saving work of God, because this historical Person so acts on us that in his working on us we can experience the eternal working of God; because He awakens such trust in Himself that, in trusting Him, we trust God.³

In accordance with this special interest, the Ritschlian theology is really surprisingly lacking in interest in the human experience of Jesus. A definitely selective process is constantly at work, by which those traits or deeds which indicate divine revelation are thrown into the foreground. Jesus' consciousness of his own sinlessness, his unerring capacity for true moral judgment, his messianic mission of saviorhood—in a word his consciousness of

¹ *The Christian's Communion with God*, p. 83.

² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³ *The Christian Faith*, II, 597.

being qualified to stand as the unique revelation of God in history—these are characteristics which are stressed. “Jesus knows no more sacred task than to point men to his own person.”

We have here a translation of the Nicene emphasis into a modern form. Just as there the humanity of Jesus is simply the indispensable *metaphysical* medium through which deity can appropriate and rescue men, so in the Ritschlian theology the historical Jesus is really just the indispensable *historical* medium through which God is revealed as redeemer. It is true that there is a great difference between the two in content. The Nicene Christology provides a sacramental means of transforming a metaphysical human nature, while for the Ritschlian, salvation consists in a changed moral and personal experience. Thus the content of Jesus’ life is set forth in personal rather than impersonal terms. A real experience of God on Jesus’ part is the source of his power to mediate God to men. Yet the emphasis is constantly laid on Jesus’ power to reveal *God*, rather than on his *experience* as a human person. Jesus is differentiated from other men rather than drawn close to them. His relation to God was unique, immediate, while ours must always be mediated through him. “We cannot enter fully into the same relation to God which Jesus had; that remains his own secret,” says Herrmann.¹

We have noted above the hostility or the indifference of theologians representing the metaphysical ideal to a thoroughgoing critical historical study of the life of Jesus. The Ritschlian attitude is similarly one of religious distrust. One of Herrmann’s important efforts was to make faith in Christ absolutely independent of the results of historical investigation. In spite of the valuable historical work done by many Ritschlians in the New Testament field, their Christology remains singularly aloof from the historical point of view. An interesting instance of this instinctive attitude is given in a pamphlet by Herrmann, in which he tries to face squarely the fact that *historical* investigation does not seem to lead us unmistakably toward the Ritschlian portrait of Jesus. Herrmann declares that our salvation through Jesus does not consist in our certainty concerning this or that fact of history but “solely

¹ *The Christian’s Communion with God*, p. 33.

in the experiences of God in which we become certain of the compelling presence of God in our own life."¹ He then argues that we may feel the divine power of the New Testament *portrait* of Jesus without raising questions of exact historicity. In other words, if this *portrait* compels us to feel the presence of God, it is an effective channel of redemption, even if we cannot be historically sure that Jesus' character as a historical person is accurately recorded. This is very close to the admission that the saving power of God might be effectively revealed through an *ideal* portrait. In such a case the actual experience of Jesus is less important than an emotionally effective way of picturing God's love. The Ritschlian interest, if confronted with historical facts which do not support the theological emphasis, is willing to dispense with the facts. The "humanity" of Jesus in this case tends to become a concept determined by theological exigencies, exactly as the "impersonal human nature" of the older Christology was derived from the a priori necessities of doctrinal construction.

In justice to the Ritschlian position, however, it should be said that its fine moral and social conception of Christian living prevents any emergence of the aristocratic and sacramental note which follows naturally from the metaphysical conception. The revelation of God in Jesus brings a potent reinforcement of man's highest moral devotion, and a spiritual equipment for moral living, to counteract the non-moral influences of the world of nature. If this conception can be released from scientific pessimism so that the power of Jesus over men shall be pictured as that of a religiously victorious citizen of this world, the experience of Jesus can be so filled with content as to avoid the danger of submerging his humanity. Haering has pointed the way to this emphasis when, in describing the power of Jesus' personality to create in us the certainty that *God* touches us, he says:

Such action of such a Person, however, is truly personal only if He Himself acknowledges in personal trust that God works in Him; only if He desires to be in God as God desires to be in Him; in other words, only if he realizes in perfection in Himself the religious relation which He is going to realize in us.²

¹ *Die mit der Theologie verknüpfte Not der evangelischen Kirche und ihre Ueberwindung*, p. 30.

² *The Christian Faith*, II, 597.

While Haering's language is somewhat abstract, and the last phrase is decidedly ambiguous, there yet seems here to be a recognition of the fact that unless Jesus' experience is something which can be shared, to some degree, by other men, redemption would inevitably consist in bridging the gulf between Jesus and us by sacramental or mysterious means. A completely ethical salvation cannot neglect the religious experience of Jesus.

III. THE MODERN DEMAND FOR A NEW VALUATION OF JESUS

The world in which Christianity arose was so different from the world in which we live today that many of the religious aspirations of that ancient period are strange to us. It was a world in which the powers of the individual were very limited. Especially if he belonged to the class of laborers or of slaves did these limitations loom large. As ancient culture declined, and the "dark ages" came on, most human beings were perforce content with a very restricted life.

One of the great sources of the power of Christianity was its promise of a wonderfully rich life to those who entered by faith into right relations to God. The miseries and disappointments of the "natural" world might be forgotten in anticipation of the glories of the supernatural world into which the Christian might enter, either at the coming of the Kingdom or after death. Life on earth was transformed when it was viewed as a preparation for future glory.

The important thing to be noted, so far as our theme is concerned, is that the rewards of religious faith were located in a supernatural world. Salvation consisted in securing rights and abilities which entitled the saved man to claim citizenship in that world of divine glory. It was inevitable, under such circumstances, that the significance of Jesus should be discovered in his original possession of superhuman power, by virtue of which he could confer salvation on needy men. The depreciation of this world in comparison with the world of divine perfection is reflected in the ever-recurring docetism of ancient Christology. The human nature of Jesus, linking him to this world of evil, was so modified that in orthodox Christology he is not a genuinely human person.

This ancient pessimism with reference to human life on this earth entered into the official theology of the church. The doctrine of innate human depravity required Christians to depreciate natural human capacities. In order to establish faith in any religious reality, its superhuman origin must be affirmed, and all traces of human frailty must be eliminated. The church appeared before the world as a divine institution, and the all too human record of its development was quickly concealed behind a doctrine of apostolic authority and succession. The human authors of the Bible were transformed into mere amanuenses of the divine Spirit. And, in similar fashion, Christ was defined primarily in terms of transcendent deity. So long as a pessimistic view of the natural world prevailed, religion could make no positive use of human achievements.

But modern men view the world with very different eyes. The discoveries of science, the invention of machinery, and the conception of evolution have combined to give us the picture of the world as plastic material. As our knowledge increases, we may by human effort rid ourselves of many ills and create for ourselves new sources of satisfaction. And this confident trust in human activity is the characteristic trait of modern thinking. The recent war has suddenly opened our eyes to its power and its extent. The pious phrases with which the German emperor interpreted the war were greeted with loud derision at the time; and now that Germany has suffered such overwhelming defeat they read like curious superstitions. Human effort, human technique, human co-operation, even human propaganda with its distorted information, were the great factors in the world-struggle.

Since the ending of hostilities we are becoming acutely aware of the moral crisis confronting us by reason of this changed view of the world. Human effort has compelled the natural resources of the earth to yield countless comforts. Human effort has enabled labor to increase production enormously, and has organized the control of exchange in such a way as to secure huge returns to favored individuals and classes. The momentous fact which confronts the civilized world today is the *consciousness of power* which is rapidly being developed in the laboring classes. When

human effort can accomplish so much, why not rely upon it and develop it in such a way as to bring to the workers a larger return? Indeed, why not reorganize society so as to give the proletariat power to dictate? For better or for worse, the world is now exalting human activity.

It is significant that this modern movement of the proletariat is accompanied by a profound distrust of traditional Christianity. For in the current creeds is found the presupposition that men are humbly to accept salvation from "above." The attitude of passive humility, so exalted in traditional piety, is precisely the attitude which permits exploitation of the laborer by the men who stand "above" him.¹ In protest against this situation the morality of "direct action" is urged. Salvation in the industrial realm is to come through human activity. To depend on "grace" is vain. So reason thousands of workingmen today.

We are living today in dreadful apprehension of the new forces let loose by this new consciousness. Men are conscious of *power*. They propose to organize and use that power to secure what they regard as their best interests. For the hitherto submissive classes, the gospel of salvation through the effective use of human power is singularly attractive. It recognizes them as responsible persons, capable of determining their own interests, rather than as voiceless dependents. Those to whom the new appeal comes have hitherto had little or no share in the making of culture. They thus have no sense of personal possession in the institutions of culture. And in the struggle for a better position in the world they reveal an appalling lack of appreciation of the social institutions which have been so painfully built up during past centuries. It would be so easy just now for a desperate, organized movement to topple over the entire structure of civilization. It is the instinctive perception of this which creates our hysterical sensitiveness to "Bolshevism."

Between this world of eager human activity and the world interpreted by traditional theology there is a difference fundamental and ineradicable. The characteristic hostility of radical social

¹ A certain advertisement intended to enlist hearty support of the church gave as one of the benefits of Christianity to a community that it makes workingmen contented!

movements to the church, the perplexed impatience of social workers with conventional theology, the eager groping of leaders of youth after more *human* ways of presenting Jesus, all testify to an unsatisfied religious need. A recent booklet to be used by Y.M.C.A. classes of high-school boys is entitled *Jesus the Head Coach*. So desperately are men feeling the need of bringing Jesus into intimate touch with our own life. For theologians to ignore this world of eager human activity and to continue fighting over the old battles of metaphysical Christology is a religious disaster.

The supreme religious need of our world is a moral and social inspiration and direction of the great human efforts which, for weal or for woe, are shaping events. If Jesus is to have any power in this world, the presentation of his moral and social human achievements is as indispensable as was his true life in the flesh in the theology of the ancient world. And these achievements must be *genuine*. They must not be robbed of moral value by making them easier for Jesus than for other men. Professor E. S. Ames has forcibly put the matter in these words:

We have little interest in the question whether a being with a double nature such as Christ is often represented, could suffer death upon a Roman cross; but we are tremendously concerned as to whether men with one nature like our own can intelligently and disinterestedly labor and serve for the welfare of our kind here and now. So much is this attitude controlling us, that the older conception of Christ as a being with a uniquely superior endowment, repels us from him. If he only acted out on earth the part for which he had been coached in heaven, or if he did a man's task with a god's strength, or if he possessed the equivalent of a magic key to unlock the plain, everyday difficulties which we meet bare-handed, then he only makes our despair the deeper.¹

For the religious inspiration of our modern life we need a conception of salvation different from that which was expressed in days before men became conscious of their personal power. If the modern world is to be saved at all, it must be through the creation of an active personal idealism rather than through a passive dependence on "means of grace." I do not mean to suggest that metaphysical and sacramental conceptions have utterly failed to create personal idealism. On the contrary, they produced heroic

¹ *The Divinity of Christ*, p. 28.

personalities in former times. But they are effective only where it is presupposed that human persons are not free, where some sort of emancipation from the bonds of "nature" or from the paralyzing condemnation of God must be *preliminary* to the exercise of moral vigor. In times of moral pessimism these conditions are fulfilled, and the redemptive work of Christ is viewed as an "enabling act" *ab extra*. But the important fact of our modern social unrest is the absence of any such presuppositions as to the inherent inabilities of men. Men are already able to act. They need only to act vigorously and in co-operation to get results. The religious need is not so much the awakening of a consciousness of personal power as it is the moral inspiration and education of already existing powers. To save a man under these conditions, Jesus must have power to stimulate and to develop moral idealism. And such stimulation is possible only as Jesus is conceived as a citizen of this world, persuasively and triumphantly devoting himself to the moral task of bringing human rights to recognition and shaping human efforts to the making of a righteous society.

This conception of the significance of Jesus is being persuasively voiced in books, sermons, study-courses, personal confessions. But theologically it is constantly brought under suspicion because of the retention of the old antithesis between divine and human nature. It is assumed that whatever is added to the human nature of Jesus must be subtracted from his divine nature. Consequently the assertion of a completely human experience in Jesus is assumed to be a denial of his divinity.

But *pari passu* with the development of interest in human personality has gone a humanizing of men's conception of God. Where now do we find emphasis on the austere and majestic absoluteness of the divine sovereignty? The formal creeds and theologies have kept the language of this old absolutism before our eyes while the thing itself was dying out. The conception of evolution together with the growing consciousness of democratic striving has put an end to our confidence in "absolutes." Things are always in the making. The supreme joy is not to *be* a child, but to be *growing* into a man. The society or nation or church content to conform to fixed norms soon becomes either innocuous

in senile complacency or hostile to the ongoing development of human welfare. The most conspicuous and significant feature of modern Protestantism is the great interdenominational co-operative movement for the stupendous program of Christianizing the world. We are living in an unfinished world. The best is yet to be.

If this be true, then the relation of God to this development must be conceived in terms of unceasing moral creativity. The finishing of an unfinished world is a task for God no less than for man. Religion for the men who are working at the task of moral and social betterment is "the consciousness of being co-workers with an Eternal Creative Good Will."¹ In protest against an absolutist conception of God which would seem to remove him from actual participation in our human conflict with an unfinished and imperfect world, the suggestion of a "finite" God has been seriously suggested. All this means that our definition of God is being radically altered by the exigencies of modern life. A new anthropomorphism is being boldly asserted, because in the modern world companionship with a remote Absolute is impossible. While there is as yet no adequate theological exposition of these religious aspirations, there is a very real and vital religious *experience* of companionship with a divine and sympathetic fellow-worker. A devout and highly successful conservative minister of the gospel once told me that his prayer seemed most real when he addressed God as "my yoke-fellow."

The bearing of this development on the religious interpretation of Jesus is apparent. If a "yoke-fellow" is a more real God than is a metaphysical absolute, then the divinity of Jesus is best asserted by an unqualified belief in his completely human experience. If God's nature is best expressed by conceiving him as confronting the task of finishing an unfinished world, then Jesus' significance will best appear if we think of him as devoting himself to his task. Says C. H. Dickinson:

Great is the advance of that faith in Jesus which has learned him as the simplest and best realization of religion, as we recognize in him that which the human child may be to the eternal Father, and accept God as he knew him, the Father of our most childlike, manliest trust and obedience and love. Our

¹ E. W. Lyman, *The Experience of God in Modern Life*, p. 149.

danger here is that we take too lightly his vital faith and our own as learned from him. We make our own faith too easy if we assume in him a sonship won and kept too easily. . . . His fellowship with the Father was not static but dynamic; it was, because it was ever being attained.¹

To those who feel sympathetically the great pulses of aspiration, discontent, and ambition in our modern world the position of Christian theology is tragic. So far behind the movements of life has it lagged that the very idea of a "theological" discussion suggests academic concern over bygone issues. Thousands of eager souls are yearning for a religious interpretation of our *human* world—a world which has discredited magic and superstition and non-moral short-cuts, a world which is just now shuddering at the possibilities of an irreligious exercise of human power, a world where even the Christian church is undergoing a mighty revival through the organization of human effort. In such a world a theology which discredits or distrusts humanity is impotent. And if Christianity is really to inspire and lead the spiritual movements of our age, it must cease the all too easy and superficial habit of judging modern religious movements by the metaphysical norms of bygone christological heresies. Arianism, Socinianism, Adoptianism, yes, and Unitarianism are comprehensible only in relation to a theological metaphysics which has ceased to stir men's souls. Why waste time in trying to discern an antiquated heresy in a modern revision of christological interpretation? Let us rather with truthful moral earnestness interpret the significance of Jesus as the great citizen of this world, who conquered for himself a real companionship with the God who ever toils at the task of making the world better. In his real conquest of a victorious faith Jesus is able to create in other men a similar power to overcome. To declare that the "religion of Jesus" is not the center of Christianity is to rob the church and the world of its greatest religious asset.

¹ *The Christian Reconstruction of Modern Life*, pp. 218 and 219.